Office of Emergency Management

Improvements to Houston's Emergency Notification Systems

City of Houston | City Council
Public Safety & Homeland Security Committee
Tuesday, May 9, 2017

Emergency Warning in Houston

- OEM is charged by Chapter 13 of the Code of Ordinances with “establish[ing] a method to conduct city-wide warnings or other public announcements and disseminate emergency public information during a disaster”
- Annex A – Warning was revised in 2016 in coordination with the Houston Police Department.

Current Capabilities

AlertHouston

- Email Notifications
- Social Media Integration
- Post to website

GHC 911 ENS

- Voice calls to landlines
- Opt-in for digital/mobile
- Opt-in for SMS
- Limited Geographic range

IPAWS

- Activate WEA Messages
- Activate Emergency Alert System (EAS)
- Integrated with NOAA WX Radio

Fixed Assets (Emergency vehicles)

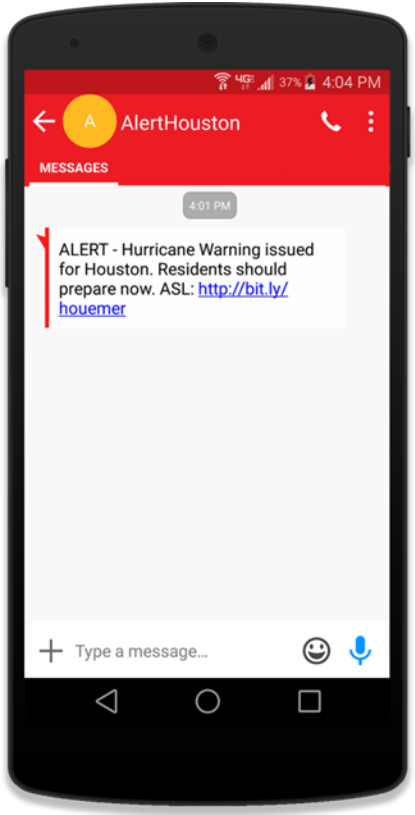
- Use HPD/HFD Vehicles
- Targets specific areas
- Draws down available staffing resources

Current Limitations - AlertHouston

- AlertHouston currently only supports Email, no voice, SMS, etc.
- The current AlertHouston vendor suspended operations. OEM working with an interim vendor until the upgrade is complete.
- AlertHouston requires manual translation, no option for multi-language alerts.
- Multiple systems requires a multi-step process

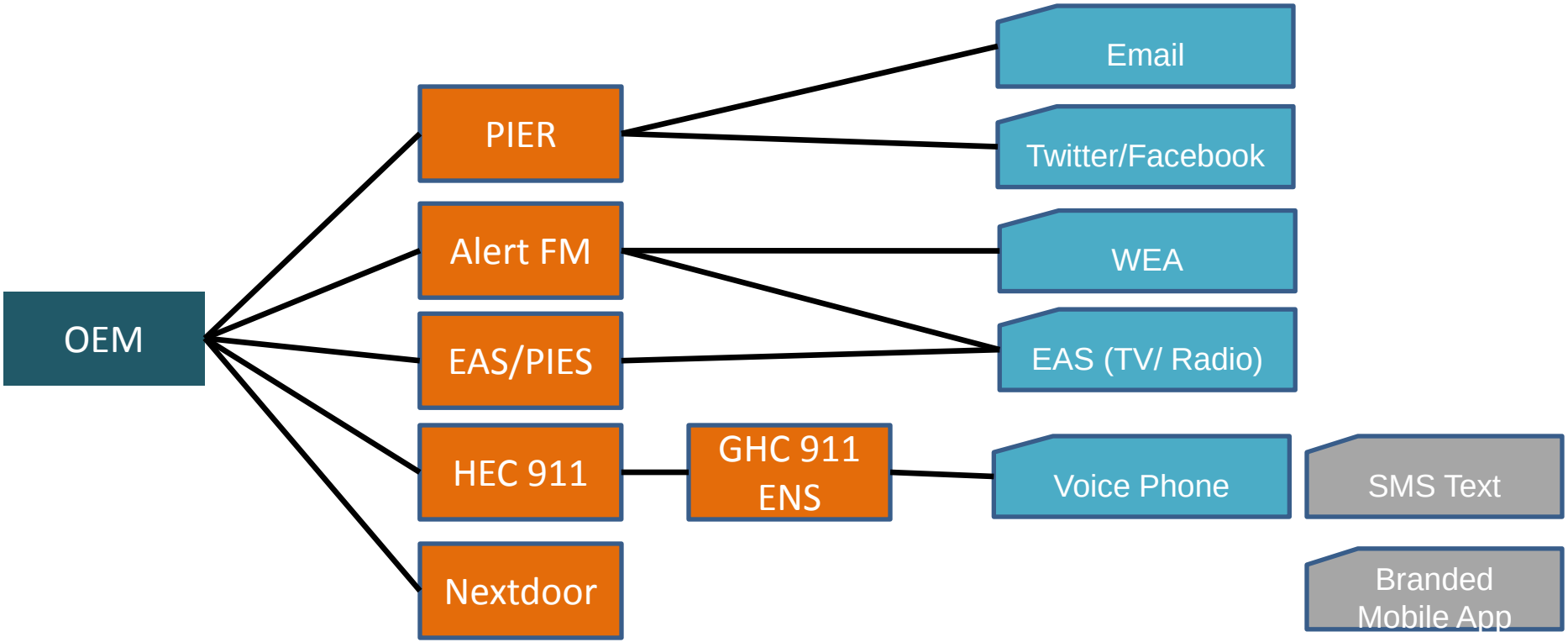
Expected Improvements - AlertHouston

- New vendor will provide:
  - SMS Messaging
  - Branded Mobile App
  - Social Media Integration
  - IPAWS Integration (WEA/EAS/NOAA)
  - Multi-Language Opt-in
  - Unified portal for alert origination
- Integrate with SAP to import City Employee data
  - Can be used by departments as part of Continuity of Operations



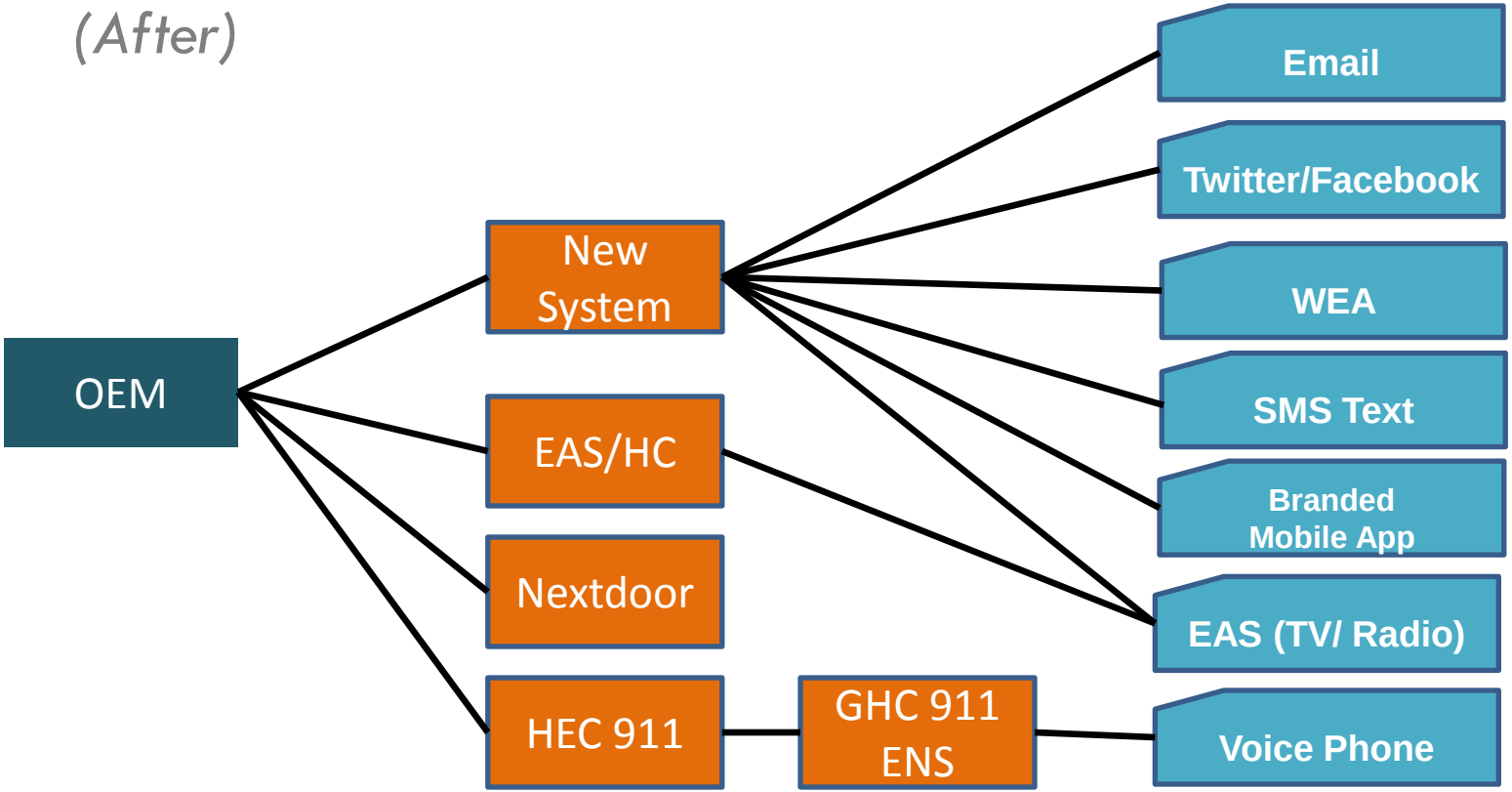
Emergency Alert Pathway

(Before)

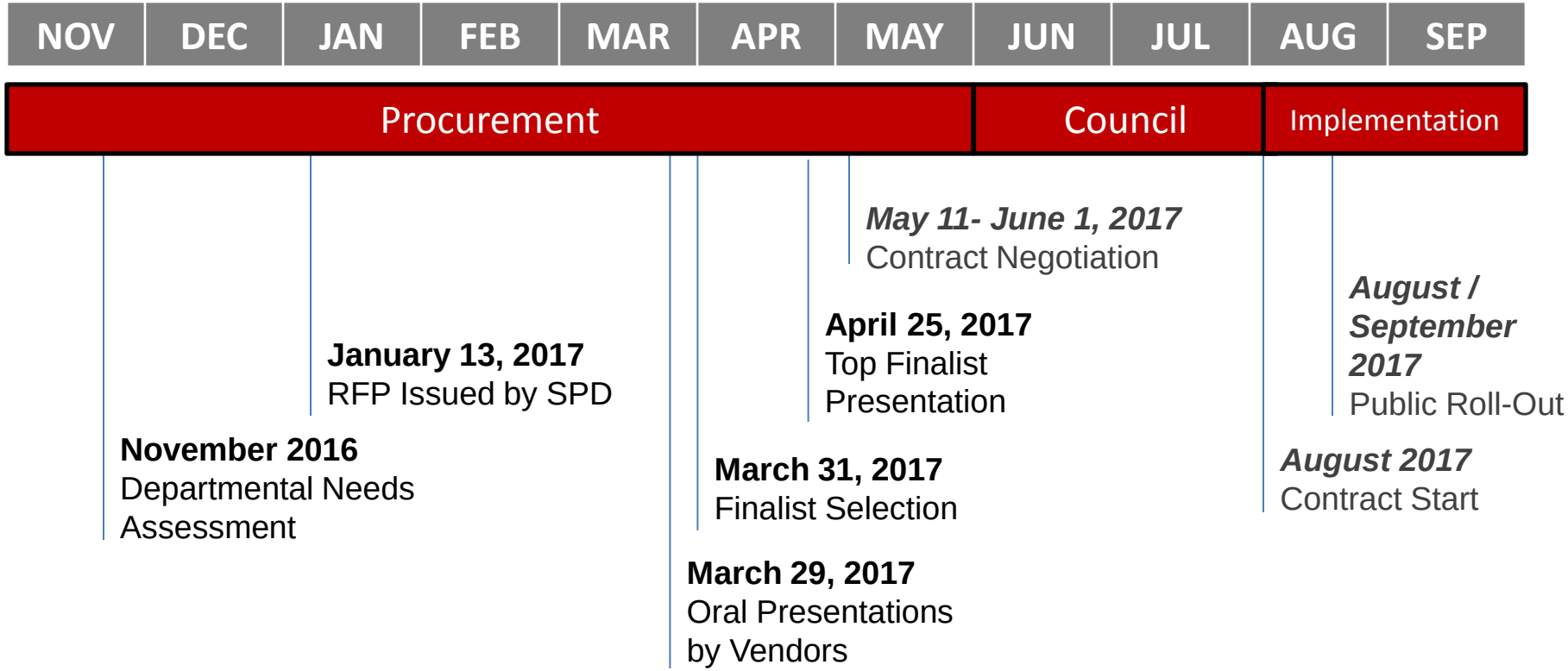


Emergency Alert Pathway

(After)



AlertHouston Project Timeline



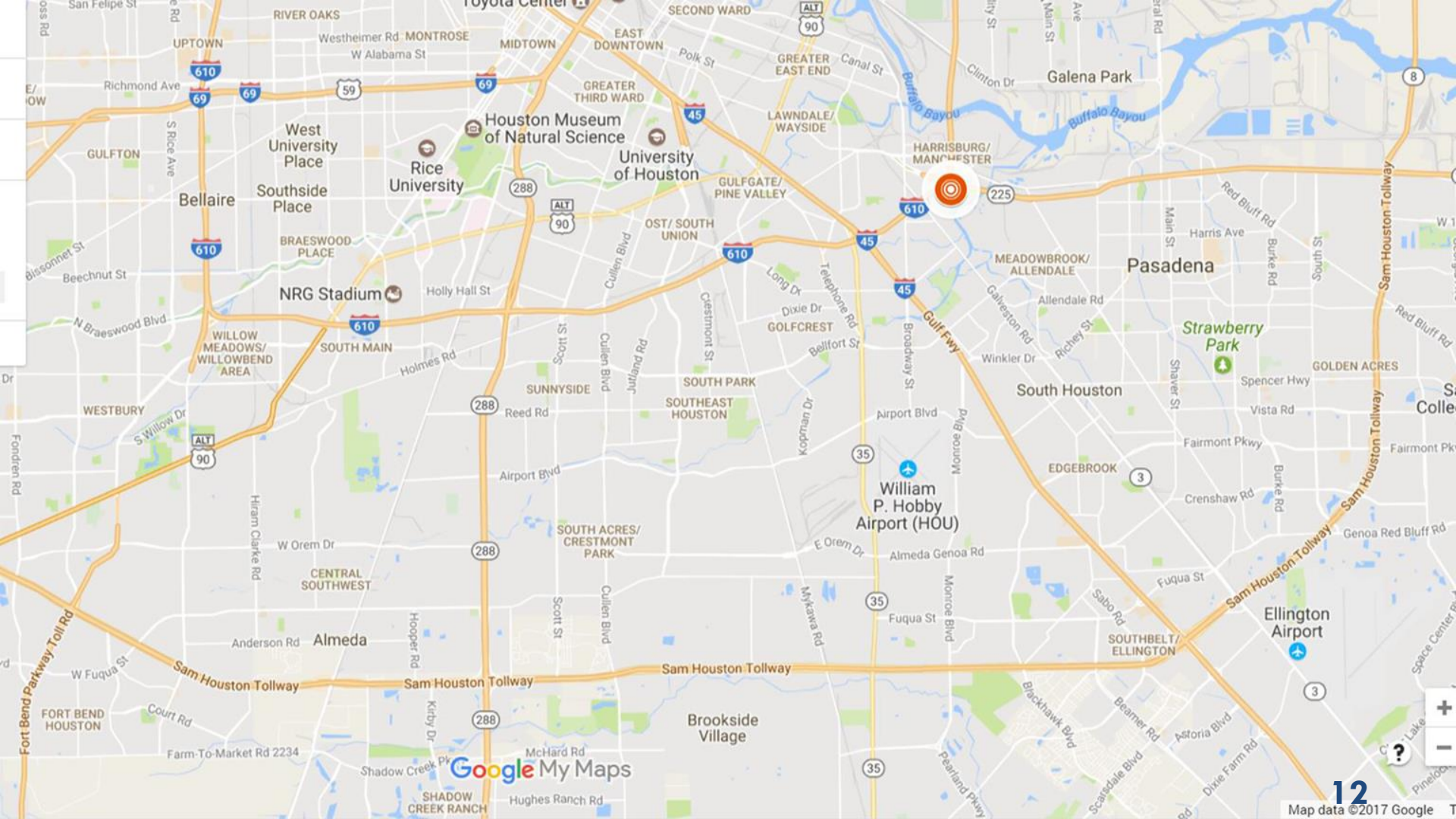
Looking Forward

- Implementation of AlertHouston enhancements
- Conducting additional training with first response agencies on Warning systems
- Public awareness campaign to promote alert registration

WIRELESS EMERGENCY ALERTS

Current Limitations - WEA

- Limited to 90 Characters
- Cannot include dynamic media (photos, video, etc.)
- Cannot be in a language other than English
- Cannot include links
- Cannot include phone numbers
- Granularity of geo-targeting is limited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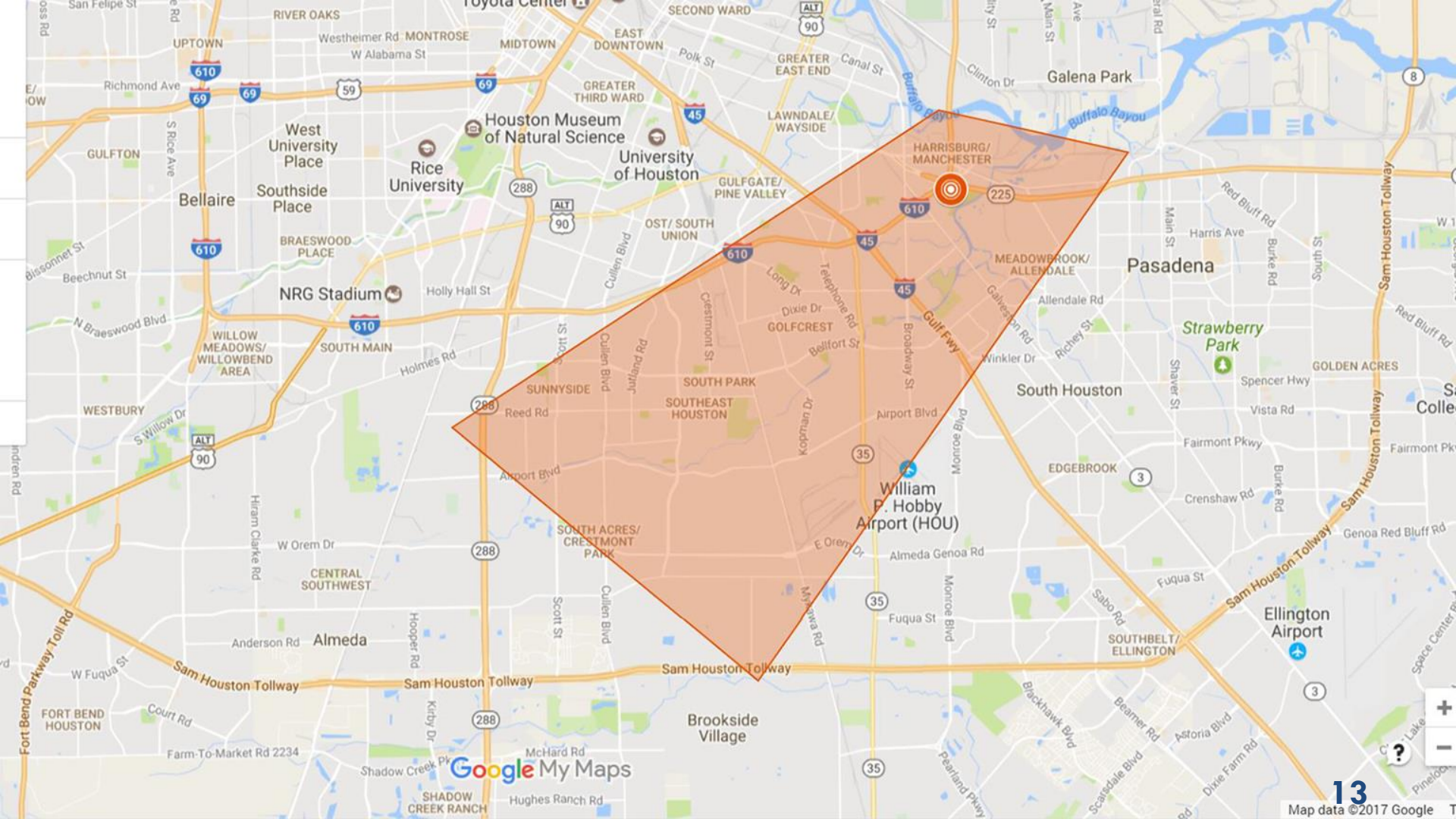
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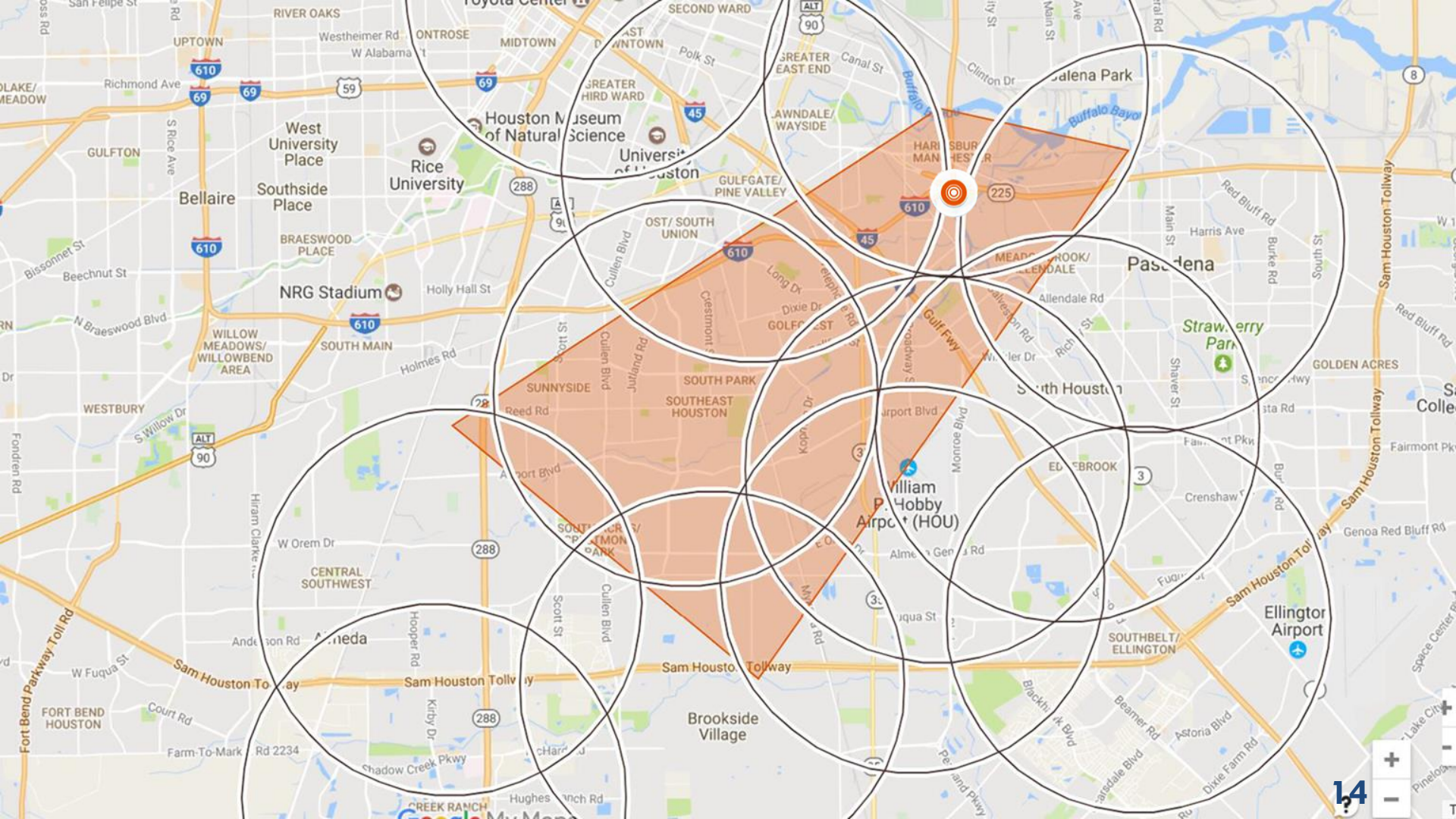

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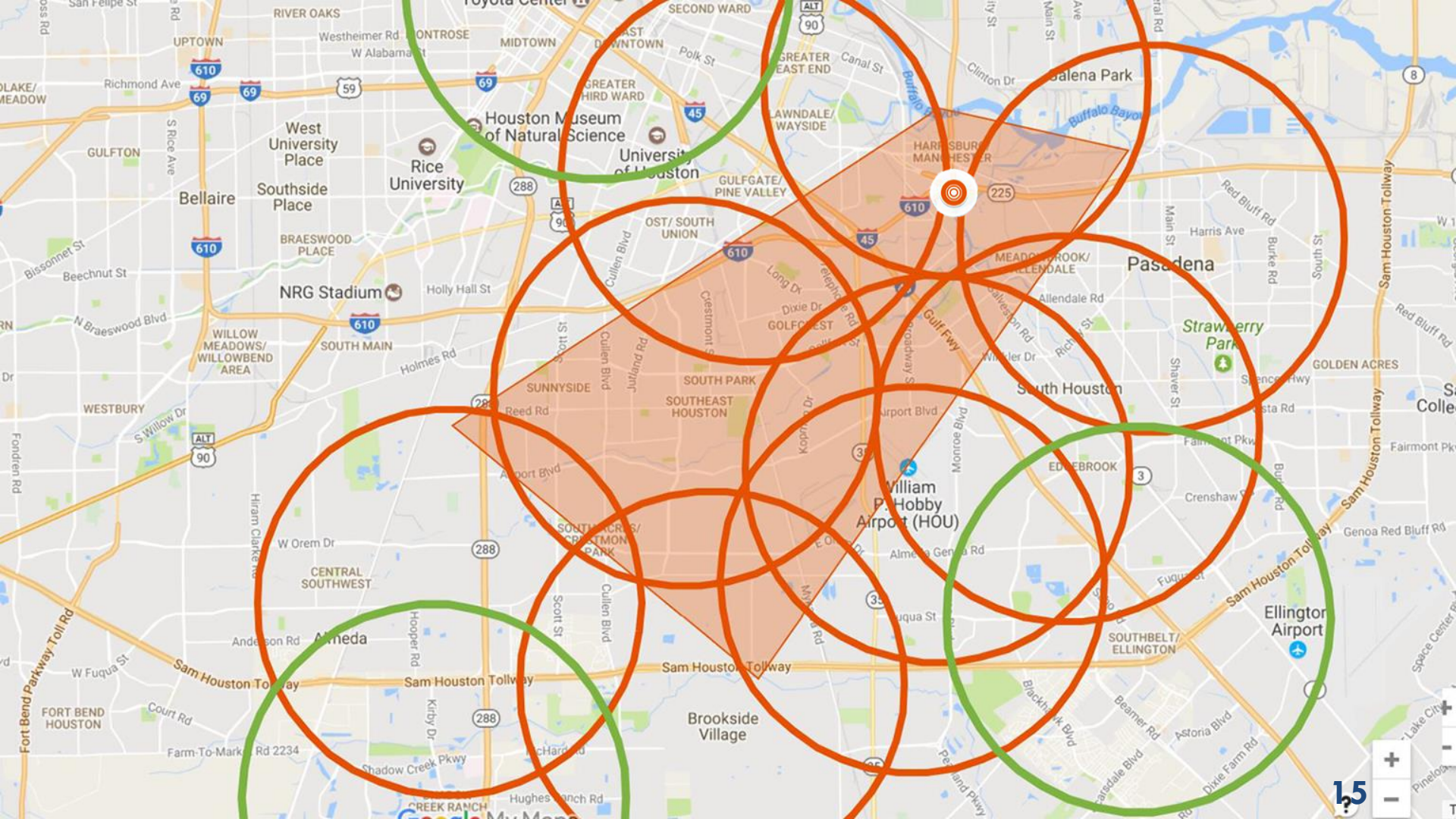
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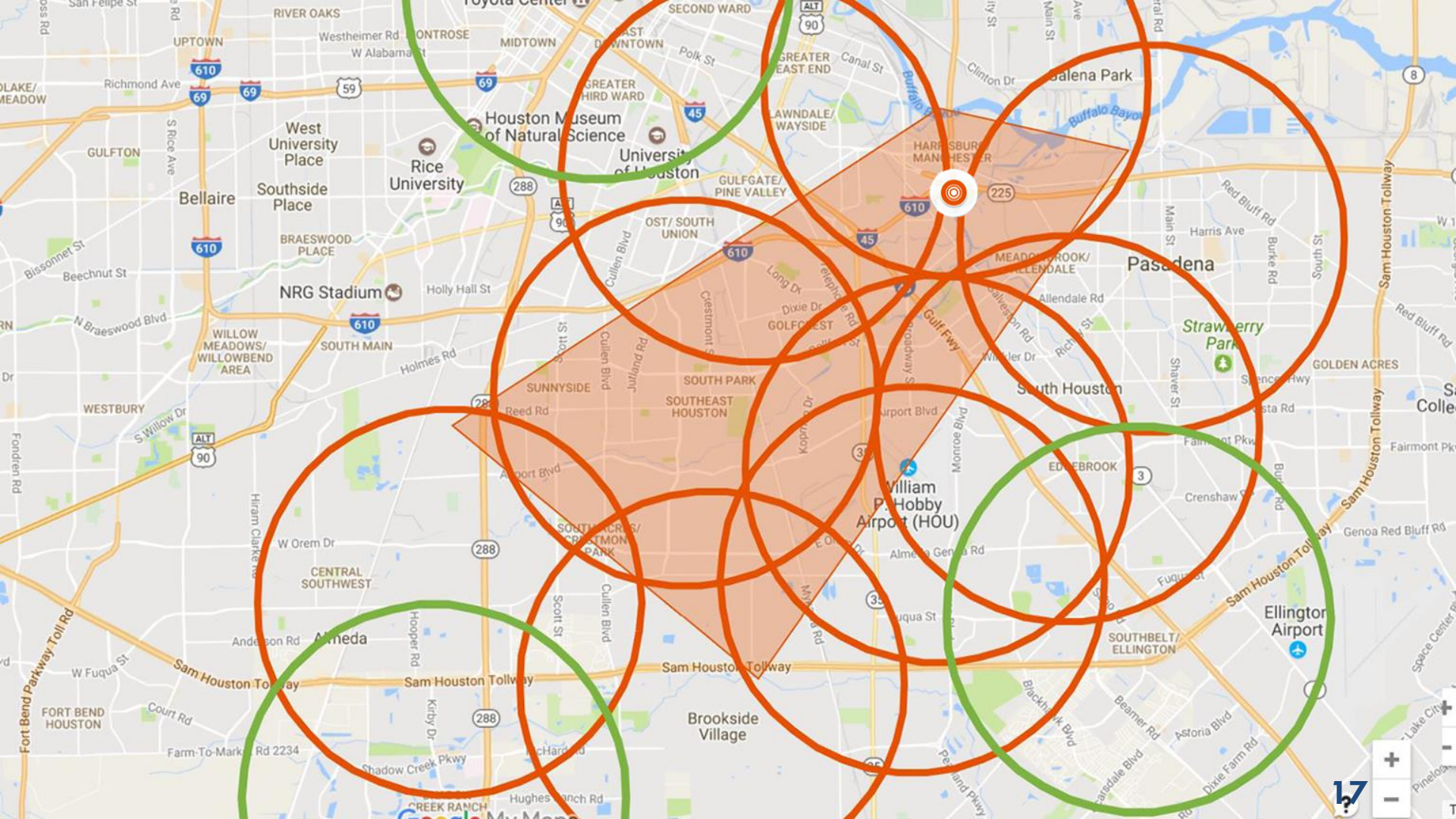
Recent FCC Updates to WEA

- Enlarge Character Count to 360
- Allow for Phone Numbers
- Allow for URLs
- Add “public safety messages” that don’t meet the “imminent threat” threshold
- Thumbnail-size images*
- Broadcast messages in English and Spanish
- Directs providers to improve geo-targeting by allowing phones to use GPS to filter messages.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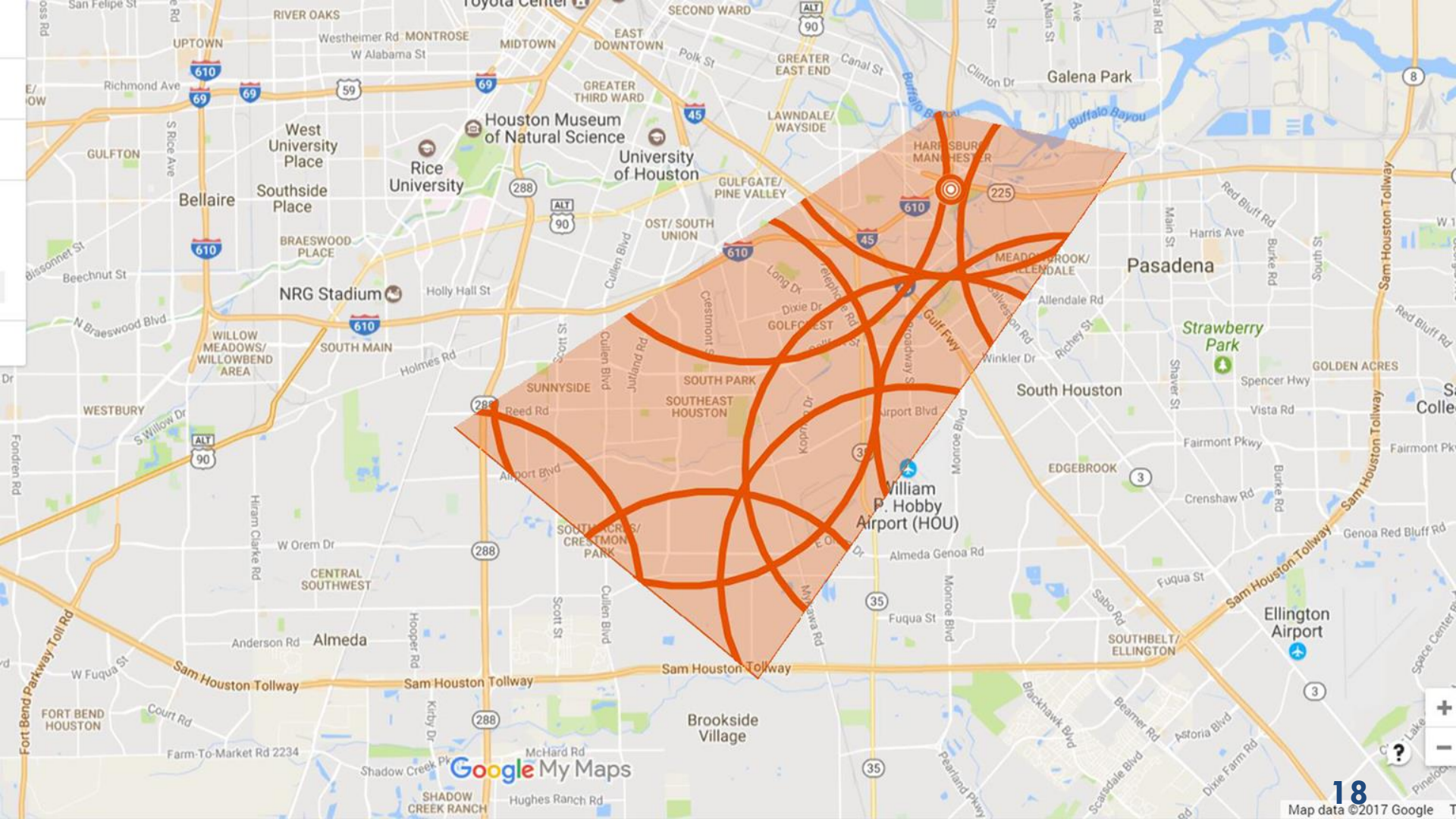

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Dennis J. Storemski

Director

City of Houston | Mayor's Office of Public Safety & Homeland Security

Dennis.Storemski@houstontx.gov

Michael M. Walter

Public Information Officer

City of Houston | Office of Emergency Management

Michael.Walter@houstontx.gov